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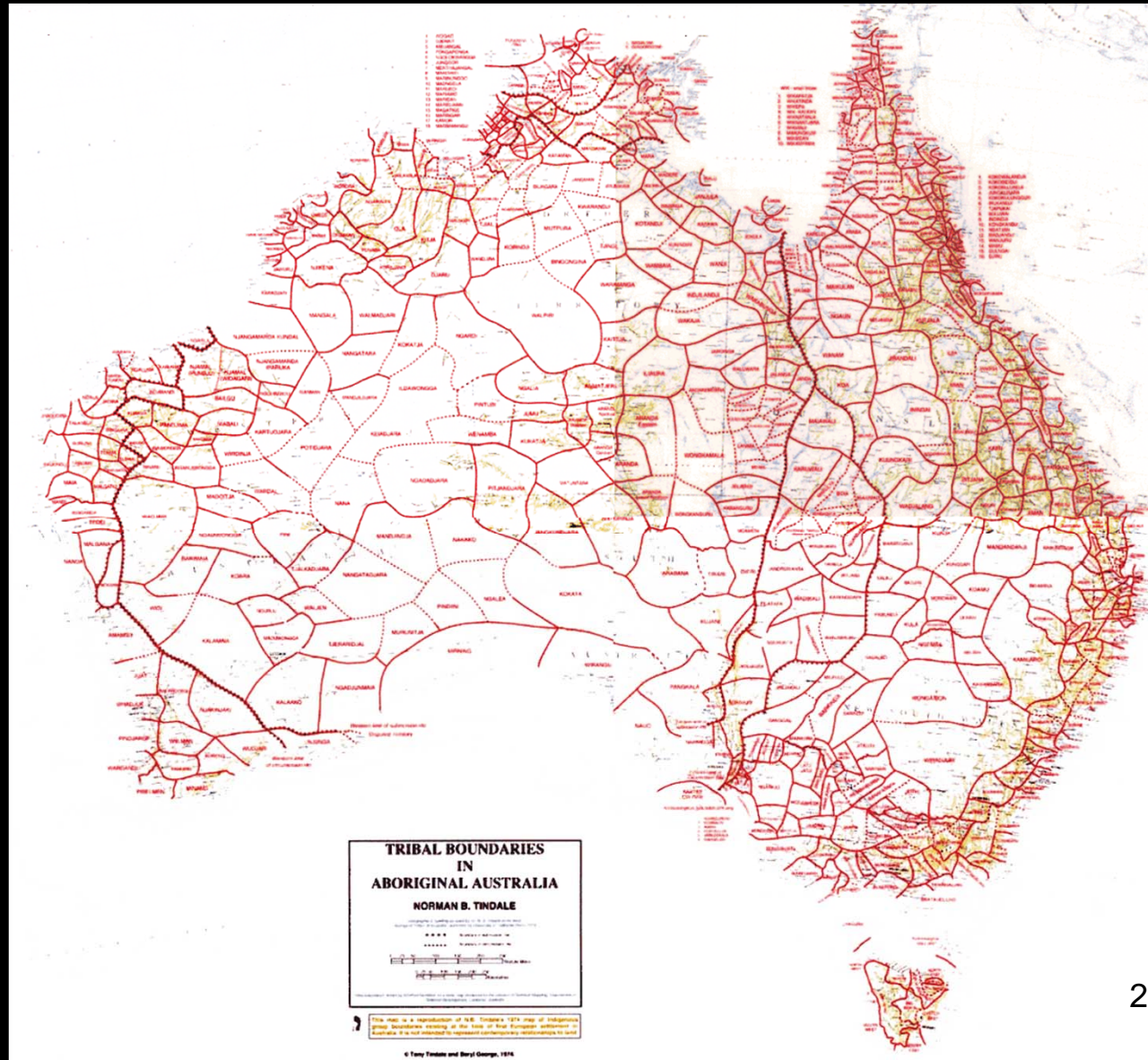


The Native Nurses of Queensland, Australia – 1940s

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International Nursing History Conference, Denmark 2012

Indigenous Australian tribal boundaries



Queensland

- Queensland population is 4,181,400
- Estimated Indigenous population is 146,400
- Two distinct Indigenous peoples:
 - Aboriginal
 - Torres Strait Islands – islands between far north Queensland and Papua New Guinea



Methodology

Primary archive sources were utilised, which included:

1. Queensland State Archives Department of Native Affairs – Matrons Notes of Missions
2. Queensland State Archives Department of Home and Health – Visiting Medical Officer's (VMO) Notes of Missions
3. Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies – Annual Reports of Missions

The administration of Indigenous Australians

Queensland Aboriginal peoples have lived under numerous government policies since invasion in 1788

Official and unofficial policies can be divided into six phases:

1. British invasion and settlement 1770–1824
2. Occupation and extermination 1824–1908
3. Protection and segregation 1873–1957
4. Assimilation 1957–1980
5. Self-determination 1980
6. Reconciliation 2000
7. Northern Territory Intervention 2007

British invasion and settlement

- British flag raised at Sydney cove in 1770
- British saw this as an adventurous voyage overcoming harsh difficulties in a hostile world
- Indigenous people saw this as invasion of country

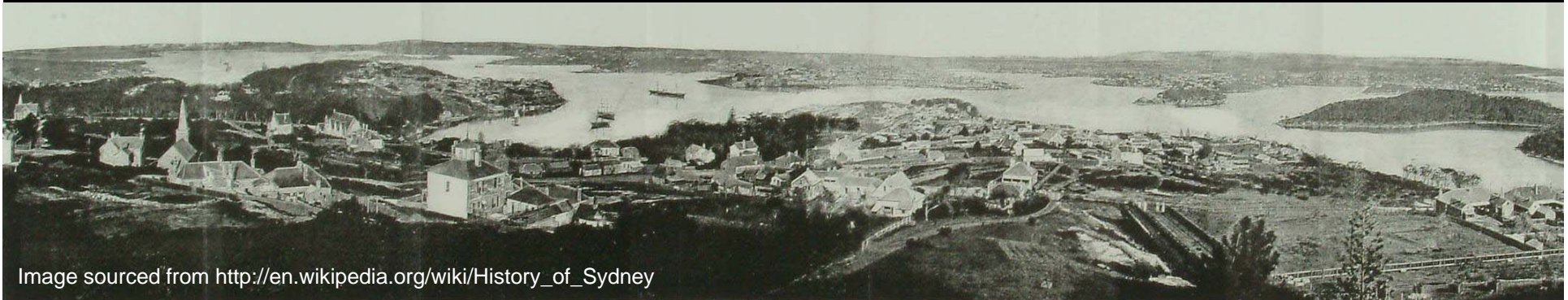


Image sourced from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Sydney

Occupation and extermination

- It is conservatively estimated that 10,000 Aboriginal people died violently in Queensland during this time
- The prevailing Darwinian belief in racial 'survival of the fittest' was rampant and it was believed Aboriginal people were 'the missing link'
- In 1902 a member of Queensland Parliament stated
"there is no scientific evidence that the Aboriginal is a human being at all."

Protection and segregation

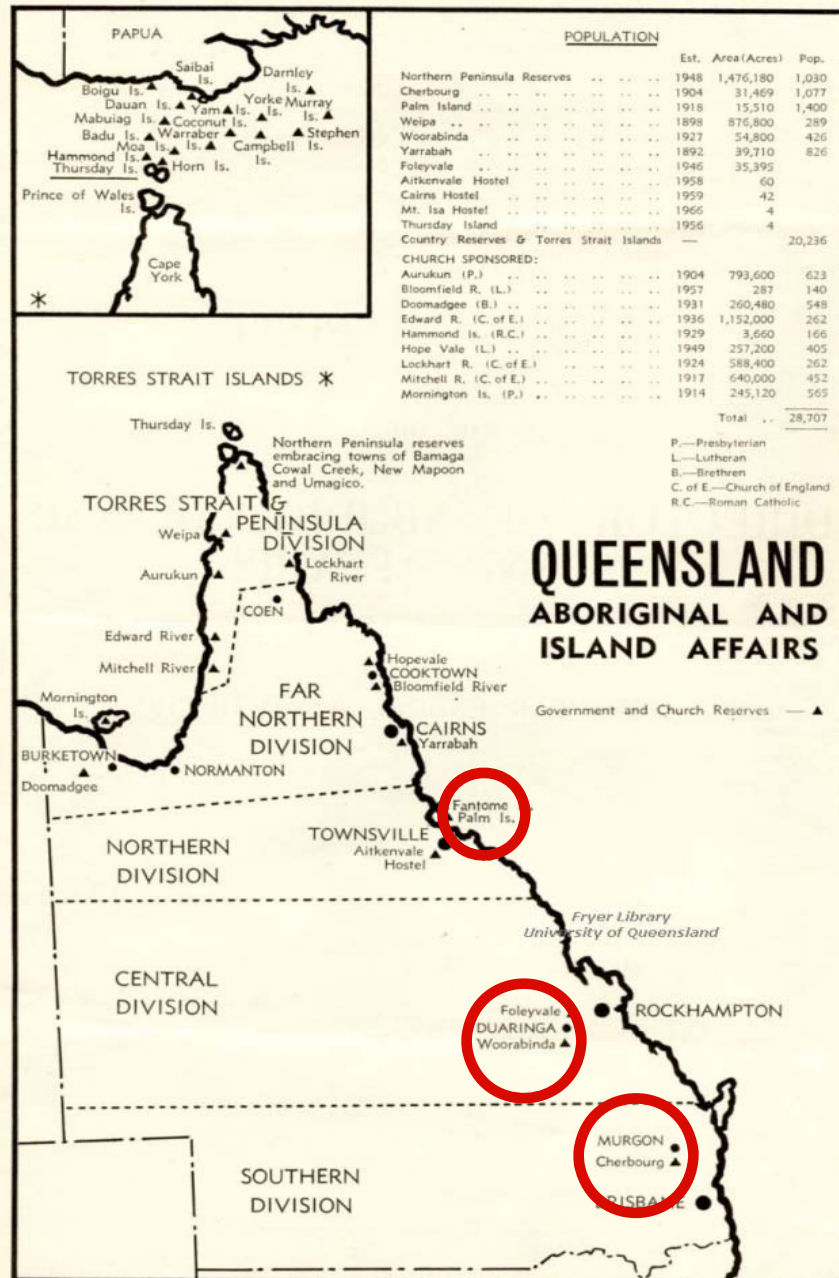
In 1897, the *Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act* was passed authorising the removal of Aboriginal people to reserves. Many Indigenous peoples refer to this time as being 'under the Act'.



**THE AUSTRALIAN
ABORIGINES LEAGUE**

**THE ABORIGINE SPEAKS -
THE VOICE OF THE ABORIGINE MUST BE HEARD**

Banner made for the
Australian Aborigines League, c. 1940s



As a result, Queensland was apportioned into districts where 'missions' or 'reserves' were established.

Aboriginal Chief Protector



Aboriginal Chief Protector

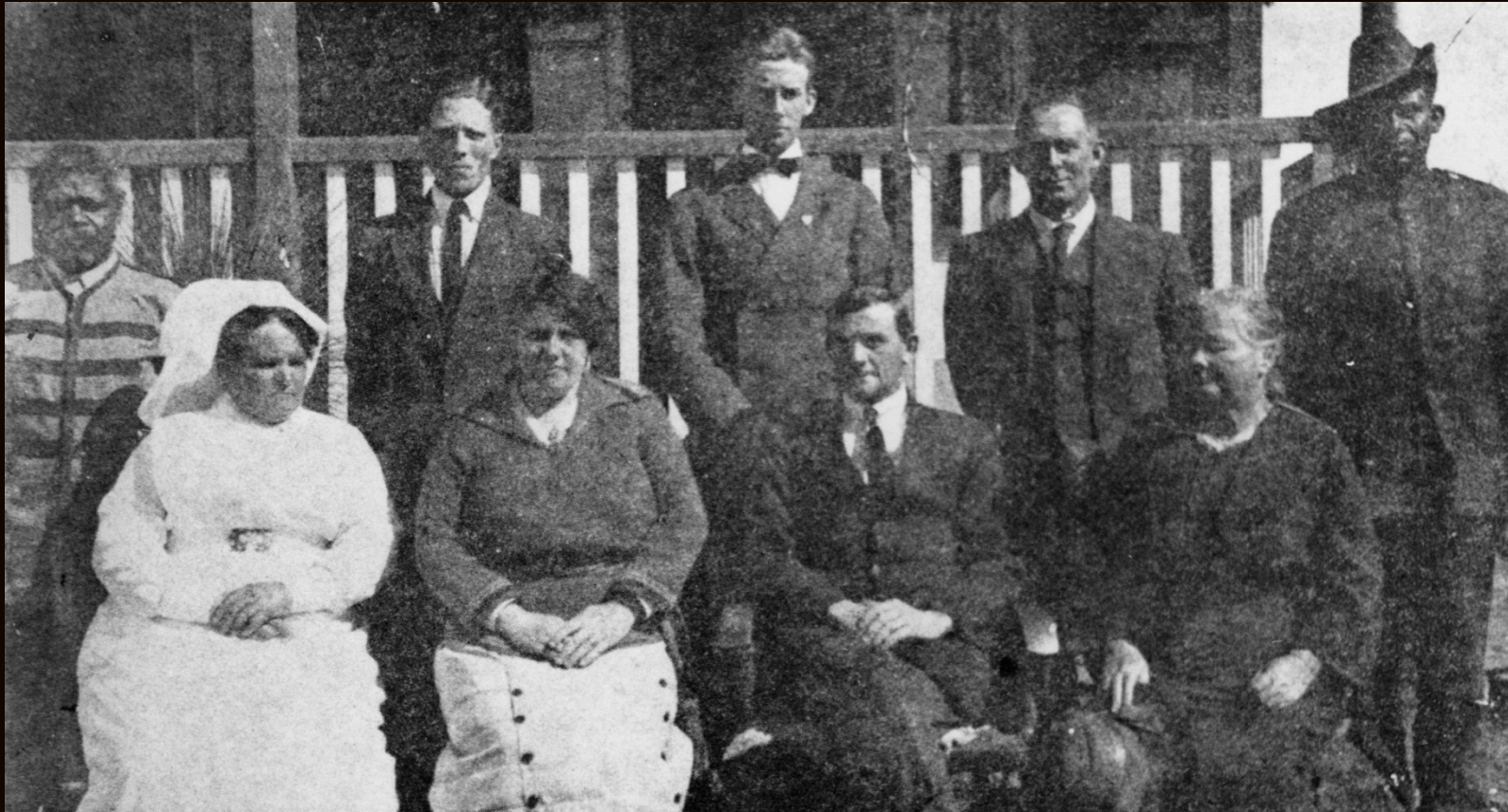
Aboriginal people lost British legal status and became wards of the state.

Missions and reserves

Non-Aboriginal people were appointed as District Protectors or Mission Superintendents and were accorded the powers to carry out their duties prescribed under the Act. These included:

- Where and how Aboriginal people were to live
- Where Aboriginal people were to work
- When or if Aboriginal people could practice cultural ceremonies
- Who Aboriginal people could marry
- Movement on and off the missions
- Removal of wages
- Imprisonment without offence
- Who was considered an Aboriginal person (blood quantum)

Woorabinda staffing



SOME WOORABINDA STAFF

Back Row: Aboriginal Tracker, Unknown, Mr. Horace Pinchin, (Dep. Superintendent), School Teacher, Aboriginal Tracker.

Front Row: Nurse Hempsted, Mrs. H. C. Colledge, Mr H. C. Colledge (Superintendent), Mrs. Murton (School Teacher).

Although taken at Taroom in 1926, most of the staff in the photograph transferred to Woorabinda.

Woorabinda – 1927



Superintendent's house



White staff's accommodation



Hospital Matron



Half-cast children's dormitory



Full blood's camp



Full blood's camp



First Woorabinda hospital (1927), with Aboriginal nurse aide



“Epidemics were another nightmare and all hands needed to the task. Native staff were not taking time off when rostered as we were.



1930's epidemic management

Ladies of the 'camp'
coming up unasked at
times to help, knowing
they could not be put on
the pay sheet."

"Many a time their
medicine men and I
worked together for the
common good in ways
which were not made
known to the powers
that be, but they trusted
me".



Aboriginal nurse aides – 1930s



1943 Visiting Medical Officer's Report



“...the housing was inadequate, and the buildings cold and draughty. Many Aboriginals slept on the ground in winter, and the blankets issue was insufficient.”

“Mr Colledge is an uncouth individual, fond of complaining, he, Blair and Thomas are all rather addicted to alcohol.”

*****Native Nurses Training Scheme

In 1945 matron Colledge commenced at Woorabinda

Chief Protector not only agreed but also sent correspondence to both Palm Island and Cherbourg to commence similar programs

Native Nurses Training Scheme

1. Girls showing an interest in nursing will be put on probation for three months and if satisfactory will sign on for three years
2. During training trainees will receive lectures by the Medical Officer and Matron on all nursing subjects, including general nursing, obstetrics, child welfare, nutrition, hygiene, anatomy etc
3. There will be periodical written and practical examinations
4. At the termination of three years of training and provided she can successfully pass the set examination, the trainee will be issued with a certificate or badge of efficiency.

Woorabinda First native nurse Gwen Doyle

Norman Tindale Collection



Negative Number: 1309
Name: Gwen Doyle
Community: Woorabinda
Date Birth (Age): 1926 (12 yrs 4 mos)

Negative numbers "N 12345" refer to photographs you can purchase from the Photographic Unit of the John Oxley Library, contact telephone number (07) 3840 7899. Make sure that you **acknowledge that the photographs are from the Tindale Collection**, otherwise you may be given an incorrect photograph.

John Oxley Library - Photographic Section,
PO Box 3488, South Brisbane, Queensland 4101

Annual Report to Chief Protector – 1948

“For some months the white staff has been reduced to the matron only. However, the native trainees have ably assisted to such an extent that all hospital services have been carried on successfully, which speaks for the initial training they have received and their desire to carry out their duties”.

Palm Island VMO's Report – 1949

“Another encouraging thing is the high results obtained in the examination papers to test their knowledge of nursing subjects. The teaching follows closely the curriculum of the great teaching hospitals”.

*****Annual Report to Chief Protector – 1948

“For some months the white staff has been reduced to the matron only. However, the native trainees have ably assisted to such an extent that all hospital services have been carried on successfully, which speaks for the initial training they have received and their desire to carry out their duties”.

Native nurses 1950s



Findings and conclusions

- The harsh exclusionary practices administered by the Queensland Government under the various Acts were the enactment of prohibiting Aboriginal women to train as nurses in mainstream hospitals
- Unless exempt from the Act, Aboriginal women were not allowed to train in Queensland Hospitals
- Significantly under researched area of Australian nursing history
- Most distressingly 'Native Nurses' were only to be traded between missions or reserves
- 'Native Nurses' not recognised by hospitals as possessing nursing qualifications

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A/59779 Hospital Matrons Monthly Note
SRS505/512 Palm Island Training Native Nurses

Government Publications

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Theses

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Honours Thesis, 1990

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Tindale, N. "Results of the Harvard-Adelaide Universities Anthropological Expedition, 1938-39.
Distribution of Australian Aboriginal Tribes: A field Survey.
Woorabinda 1927-1977 Golden Year Jubilee

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